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# Library Services and Construction Act: Testimonies (1994): Speech 18

Jeanne H. Simon

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U.S. NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION  
SCIENCE

Jeanne H. Simon

Chairperson

Statement

"Library Roles in the Information Infrastructure"  
Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities

U.S. Senate

10:00 am

SD-430

19 April 1994

Thank you for the opportunity of submitting this statement today as Chairperson of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.

This hearing on "Library Roles in the Information Infrastructure" is both timely and important. America's libraries constitute a critical element in the daily life of our National community. Like the highways, roads, and bridges which we use daily, the American public depends upon libraries for access to information.

Our public, academic, school, state, and special libraries exist to satisfy people's need for information, knowledge, wisdom, and delight. To continue to fulfill our society's need for information in the future, libraries must be a key part of the emerging National information infrastructure. Our libraries must continue to provide opportunities for access to advanced information services, as well as places for us to find books, conduct research, to attend childrens' story hour, and to participate in community programs.

Many in the library community were encouraged to hear President Clinton mention libraries in his State of the Union Address this past January. The President said:

*"...we must also work with the private sector to connect every classroom, every clinic, every LIBRARY, every hospital in America into a national information superhighway by the year 2000."*

The President's strong statement came following Vice President Gore's remarks at UCLA in early January, outlining the Administration's vision for creating the National Information Infrastructure.

The Vice President recently reinforced the Administration's commitment to providing hospitals, libraries, and educational institutions with connections to the data highway at low cost. At a Public Interest Summit meeting here in Washington on the 29th of March, Vice President Gore stated that universal access to the information infrastructure is a high National priority. He also stated that the Administration will aim to develop a system for tomorrow which will work like the Internet of today where customers will be able to receive and send information over the information superhighway.<sup>1</sup>

The National Commission is excited and encouraged about the potential for libraries in the vision of a National information infrastructure serving all Americans.

But we must identify what is needed to realize this vision. The following questions are of concern to the National Commission.

- What barriers must be overcome for libraries to continue to serve our democratic society effectively in the information age?
- How well prepared are America's libraries to serve as public access ramps to the information superhighway?
- What will libraries have to pay for access to the information superhighway?
- What training will librarians and patrons need and how will this training be funded?
- What kinds of information superhighway services will libraries provide for patrons?
- What Federal funds are needed to connect libraries to the electronic highway?

With the commitment of the Administration, the support of Congress, and the participation of the communications, cable, and media industries, we could well see significant advancement for libraries in the next decade.

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, David. "Vice President Gore Says National Data Highway Must be 'Open and Accessible to Everybody'." in Chronicle of Higher Education, April 6, 1994. p. A28.

Or, we could see the role of libraries diminish with the advent of a commercial multimedia interactive information marketplace. The challenge is to understand the role that libraries must play in this new information superhighway. The challenge is also to identify the Federal in support of libraries in the information age.

Librarian of Congress Jim Billington expressed the challenge well earlier this year. He said:

*"Policy Makers must determine how to sustain, in the electronic age, the Democratic and equal access to information that free public libraries have provided in the age of print."*

The National Commission has been actively considering issues related to the role of libraries in the National information infrastructure. This morning I want to share the results of the Commission's work in identifying the Federal government's role in providing the library "on ramp" to the information superhighway. The Commission is completing a survey of public libraries and the Internet which addresses recommendations made at the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS) which call for the development of national "information superhighway" network to "...be available in all libraries and other information repositories at every level."

The preliminary findings from the Commission's public libraries and Internet survey indicate the following:

- those libraries located in communities serving smaller populations are less likely to have Internet connections;
- the interest of public librarians and state-based planners is critical in the development of Internet connectivity;
- the majority of public libraries surveyed see that the Federal government has a role in connecting public libraries to the Internet.

These findings will have important public policy implications for issues of equity, network literacy, connectivity, affordability, and access. The issues will be discussed in the project final report available later this Spring. Copies of the final survey report will be provided to Congress and the President in a few weeks.

We are making good progress in analyzing the returned surveys from 1,495 sent to a selected sample of public libraries throughout the country in early

January. The Commission received the assistance of the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics and the 50 State libraries in contacting public libraries for this survey. 75% of the surveys have been received. The preliminary results show the following:

A.) In response to the question "Is your library connected to the Internet in any way?" 20.9% responded YES, and 79.1% responded NO.

B.) Initial analysis of the survey responses indicates that public libraries serving larger populations have a greater chance of being connected to the Internet than those serving smaller populations:

- 77% of libraries serving populations of over 1,000,000 have Internet access
- 64% of libraries serving populations of 500,000 – 999,999 have Internet access
- 76% of libraries serving populations of 250,000 to 499,999 have Internet access
- 54.4% of libraries serving populations of 100,000 – 249,999 have Internet access
- 43.7% of libraries serving populations of 50,000 – 99,999 have Internet access
- 27.6% of libraries serving populations of 25,000 – 49,999 have Internet access
- 23.2% of libraries serving populations of 10,000 – 24,999 have Internet access
- 12.9% of libraries serving populations of 5,000 – 9,999 have Internet access
- 13.3% of libraries serving populations of under 5,000 have Internet access

C.) In response to a question about the importance of various factors affecting current public library involvement with the Internet the following priority summarizes the average ranking:

- I. Costs of getting connected to the Internet
- II. Availability of staff time to develop Internet expertise
- III. Availability of training on the Internet and its uses
- IV. Staff skills to "navigate" the Internet
- V. Costs of software
- VI. Costs of hardware
- VII. Availability of in-house technical expertise
- VIII. Level of community interest

**IX. Degree of interest of governing body**

**D.) In response to a question about the importance of the Federal role in public library use of the Internet the following priority summarizes the average ranking:**

- I. Connecting libraries to the Internet**
- II. Support for purchase of equipment**
- III. Support for research and development**
- IV. Training assistance**

**E.) In response to a question about what role public libraries should fulfill in the Internet, the following priority summarizes the average ranking:**

- I. Public libraries should provide Internet-based services to library patrons**
- II. Public libraries should serve as a safety net for public access to the Internet**
- III. Internet services provided through public libraries should be without charge to the patron**
- IV. Future monetary support for public libraries is integrally linked to the development of the Internet**

**F.) Initial analysis of the survey responses indicates that an average of 16.1% of public libraries using the Internet have public access terminals:**

- 8% of libraries serving populations of over 1,000,000 have public access terminals**
- 30.1% of libraries serving populations of 500,000 – 999,999 have public access terminals**
- 10.1% of libraries serving populations of 250,000 to 499,999 have public access terminals**
- 17.5% of libraries serving populations of 100,000 – 249,999 have public access terminals**
- 10.3% of libraries serving populations of 50,000 – 99,999 have public access terminals**
- 9.3% of libraries serving populations of 25,000 – 49,999 have public access terminals**
- 16.3% of libraries serving populations of 10,000 – 24,999 have public access terminals**
- 20.6% of libraries serving populations of 5,000 – 9,999 have public access terminals**

**19% of libraries serving populations of under 5,000 have public access terminals**

**Among the various issues which will be addressed in the report resulting from the NCLIS survey are the following:**

**Building the National information infrastructure  
Developing cooperative ventures with NII participants  
Providing a societal safety net  
Becoming network literate  
Connecting to the information highway  
Developing network applications  
Providing electronic government services  
Evaluating network services  
Preserving copyright/intellectual property rights  
Discrepancies in access to telecommunications services  
Pricing networked services  
Allocating adequate resources for public library NII participation**

**The survey of public libraries and Internet was done in accordance with a 1991 amendment to the 1970 law establishing the National Commission which is P.L. 91-345 (July 20, 1970). The amendment authorizes the Commission to...**

**"...promote research and development activities which will extend and improve the Nation's library and information handling capability as essential links in the national and international communications and cooperative networks."**

**Proposals for library involvement in the information superhighway are currently under consideration by Congress and the Administration. Federal policy makers need to decide on programs for purchase of computer equipment, to establish reduced telecommunications charges, and to train library staff and patrons. These decisions require current National data about public libraries and the Internet to formulate National policies and practices that extend library-based information superhighway services to all areas of the National community.**

**In addition, proposals are under discussion for reauthorizing the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) to enable libraries to use Federal funds for Internet connections. Analysis of the NCLIS survey results will review Federal policy alternatives. With the rapid pace of information superhighway development, we need this information quickly to make informed decisions.**

The NCLIS survey project was also developed in direct response to a question raised at a July, 1993 policy discussion meeting held at the Library of Congress. At this meeting, Vice President Al Gore asked to what degree public libraries can serve as a "safety net" for access to Internet information and services. The Vice President also raised issues related to how the Internet could provide better social equity for the public.

The purposes for performing the Commission's survey of public libraries and the Internet were:

- 1.) to conduct a sample quick-response National survey of U.S. public libraries to determine the nature, extent, and type of public library involvement with network services available from the Internet; and
- 2.) to perform a policy analysis of the impact of the Internet and networked services on the U.S. public library community. This analysis will provide the library, information sciences community, and Federal policy makers, with baseline information from which current policy initiatives related to libraries and the Internet can be assessed and from which new initiatives can be proposed to facilitate the extension of information infrastructure services to all Americans at reasonable cost.

In response to a survey question asking for favorite stories about Internet successes and frustrations, the following were offered:

"We are still too awestruck to get frustrated!"

"Computer people should be burned at the stake, with software manuals used exclusively for fuel!!"

"A library staff member used Internet to locate a copy of the constitution of Macedonia (one of the new countries formed from the former Yugoslavia) for a customer interested in property rights in that country."

"A library staff member used the Internet to locate the third quarter US gross domestic product. Our printed copy only gave it for the second quarter."

"The copyright file at the Library of Congress provided us with verification of an unusual cartoon character that we had been unable to locate in our print sources."



These stories of the uses public librarians are currently making of the Internet offer a glimpse of the service and resource potential available with the arrival of the information superhighway.

..... Social equity can be improved by strengthening the role of the public library in our communities. Library on-ramps to the information superhighway can expand and enhance access to the educational, intellectual, and cultural resources available in the Nation's libraries. The electronic information highway can connect public library patrons to academic, research, school, and state library resources.

University libraries are already working to make their rich resources accessible electronically to public and school libraries. Such cooperative activity among libraries includes resource sharing, preservation, education, and training, with a particular focus on network-based applications. Libraries of all types need to link patrons to the full range of services available through the information superhighway. The key is to maintain and enhance these relationships among libraries to support access at the community level. Building on current programs and the existing library infrastructure will allow the library user to access the extensive wealth of educational and cultural resources.

But, just as National attention is focused on health care system reform, National support is needed for our libraries to enter the 21st century. We need Federal support to assure that all Americans, regardless of economic, cultural, or social status, or geographic location, will be granted access to the full range of services available on the information superhighway.

The information infrastructure offers the potential to improve our Nation's quality of life. America's intellectual heritage is too valuable to have the information superhighway bypass our libraries.

**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE INTERNET/NATIONAL INFORMATION  
INFRASTRUCTURE:  
STUDY RESULTS, POLICY ISSUES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Public Libraries Connected to the Internet by Library Service Population</b>	
<b>1 Million</b>	<b>77.0%</b>
<b>500,000</b>	<b>64.0%</b>
<b>250,000</b>	<b>76.0%</b>
<b>100,000</b>	<b>54.4%</b>
<b>50,000</b>	<b>43.7%</b>
<b>25,000</b>	<b>27.6%</b>
<b>10,000</b>	<b>23.2%</b>
<b>5,000</b>	<b>12.9%</b>
<b>Less than 5,000</b>	<b>13.3%</b>
<b>Total Libraries Connected</b>	<b>20.9%</b>

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suv.m.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).

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**Public Libraries Connected to the Internet by Region**

<b>Midwest</b>	<b>15.4%</b>
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>25.9%</b>
<b>South</b>	<b>16.6%</b>
<b>West</b>	<b>26.2%</b>
<b>Total Libraries Connected</b>	<b>20.9%</b>

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suvn.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).

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<b>Public Libraries Connected to the Internet that Provide Public Access Terminals by Region</b>	
<b>Midwest</b>	<b>12.2%</b>
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>11.2%</b>
<b>South</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
<b>West</b>	<b>23.6%</b>
<b>Total Libraries Providing Terminals</b>	<b>16.1%</b>

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suvn.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).

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<b>Public Libraries Connected to the Internet that Provide Public Access Terminals by Library Service Population</b>	
<b>1 Million</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
<b>500,000</b>	<b>30.1%</b>
<b>250,000</b>	<b>10.1%</b>
<b>100,000</b>	<b>17.5%</b>
<b>50,000</b>	<b>10.3%</b>
<b>25,000</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
<b>10,000</b>	<b>16.3%</b>
<b>5,000</b>	<b>20.6%</b>
<b>Less than 5,000</b>	<b>19.0%</b>
<b>Total Libraries Providing Terminals</b>	<b>16.1%</b>

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suvn.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).

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<b>Factors Affecting Current Public Library Involvement with the Internet</b>	
	<b>1=Very Important; 5=Very Unimportant</b>
<b>Costs of getting connected to the Internet</b>	1.95
<b>Costs of hardware</b>	2.29
<b>Costs of software</b>	2.28
<b>Availability of in-house technical expertise</b>	2.43
<b>Availability of staff time to develop expertise on the Internet</b>	1.96
<b>Availability of training on the Internet and its uses</b>	2.05
<b>Staff skills to "navigate" the Internet</b>	2.06
<b>Level of community interest</b>	2.59
<b>Degree of interest by governing body</b>	2.59

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suvn.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).

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<b>Public Libraries' Rank of Federal Government Roles in Supporting Internet Access through Public Libraries</b>	
	1=Most Important; 5=Least Important
<b>Support for purchase of equipment</b>	1.80
<b>Training assistance</b>	2.23
<b>Support research and development efforts</b>	2.21
<b>Connecting libraries to the Internet</b>	1.63

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suvn.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).

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<b>Public Librarian Agreement/Disagreement with Public Library Roles in the Internet</b>	
	1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree
<b>Public libraries should provide Internet-based services to library patrons</b>	1.70
<b>Future monetary support for public libraries is integrally linked to the development of the Internet</b>	1.86
<b>Public libraries should serve as a safety net for public access to the Internet</b>	1.74
<b>Internet services provided through public libraries should be without charge to the patron</b>	1.76

<sup>1</sup> From: McClure, C.R. <cmclure@suvn.syr.edu>, Bertot, J.C., and Zweizig, D.L. The Role of Public Libraries in the Internet/NII: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (forthcoming).